Philosophy 20A – History of Ancient Greek Philosophy

Fall 2008

Mid-Term Exam

This Mid-Term exam is a take-home essay exam. It is worth 25% of your overall course grade and must be handed into your TA at the end of class on Monday, October, 20th. There are 100 total points possible on the exam. There are two sections to the exam: Section I is worth a total of 20 points; Section II is worth a total of 80 points. Please follow the instructions given for each section as closely as possible.

Section I – Short Answer (20 points total)

Please answer **all four of the questions in this section**. Your answers to these questions should be concise and to the point. There's no need to write more than a (short) paragraph for each in order to get full credit.

1. As it is characterized in the lecture notes, what is philosophy? Summarize and briefly explain both the 'subject matter' and 'method' of the discipline?

2. Summarize and briefly explain the role that 'myth' played in shaping the world-view of pre-philosophical ancient Greek thought. Who were the two most important/influential Greek poets shaping ancient Greek thought?

3. What was the *primary* difference between the way in which the poets and the Pre-Socratics attempted to account for the true nature of reality (both in terms of its origin and structure)?

4. As it has been characterized in this course, summarize and briefly explain the problem of "the One and the Many" (or 'Being and Becoming'). What are the two 'crucial questions' that the Pre-Socratics seemed to wrestle with in connection with this problem?

Section II – Longer Essay (80 points total)

Please answer **two of the three questions in this section** (the choice of which two is up to you). Each question you answer is worth a total of 40 points. To get full credit it is very important to answer every part of the question to the best of your ability. Generally speaking, you should be able to answer each question in approx. 1½ to 2 pages of writing (double spaced). Grading will be based on accuracy, completeness, and philosophical acuity of the essay considered as a response to the question posed. Clear, precise writing is also essential—please *no* flowery prose.

1. Please compare and contrast the metaphysical accounts put forward by the "Milesian monists" (Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes). What, according to each thinker, was the *archē* ('source', 'ruling principle', 'stuff ') of reality? What reasons (or reasoning) seem to support each thinker's suggested *archē*? What was the principle/process of change posited by each thinker that is supposed to explain/account for the many different and changing things that we encounter in the world of experience? Finally, what problems/difficulties does each metaphysical account seem to face?

2. According to Heraclitus, what is the *archē* ('source', 'ruling principle') of reality? As it has been characterized in this course, how is Heraclitus' suggestion both similar to, yet different than the accounts put forward by the "Milesian monists". What reasons (or reasoning) seem to support Heraclitus' suggested account? What is the principle/process of change posited by Heraclitus that is supposed to explain/account for the many different and changing things that we encounter in the world of experience? What, in Heraclitus' opinion, is the 'true nature' of reality? What illustrations/examples help to support his account? Finally, what problems/difficulties (if any) does his account seem to face?

3. According to Parmenides, what is the 'true nature' of reality? As it has been characterized in this course, summarize and briefly explain the argument that Parmenides puts forward in support of his account. What is the 'central thesis' underwriting Parmenides' reasoning? Is it a plausible thesis? If you think so, explain why. If not, explain why you think not. What alarmingly counterintuitive consequences are supposed to follow (logically) from the truth of Parmenides' central thesis? Finally, what problems/difficulties (if any) does his account seem to face?